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UPDATE ON THE HEALTH STATUS OF AMERICAN INDIANS IN NORTH CAROLINA

Prepared for
North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs

by

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As in 1979 (1) and 1982 (2), the State Center for Health Statistics has undertaken analysis of race-specific sociodemographic, natality, mortality, and morbidity data focusing on the relative status of the state's American Indian residents. In addition to this report, which purports to highlight findings for the information of other researchers interested in the health status of N.C. race groups, additional data for 20 counties (those having 300 or more Indian residents in 1980) have been provided to the Commission of Indian Affairs.

In past projects for the Commission, existing data were heavily utilized, one result being that we were unable to study infant mortality in relation to underlying infant and maternal characteristics. In the current effort, we have concentrated our efforts in the utilization of the linked infant death and birth records in order to study outcomes for various subgroups of the 1979-83 birth cohort. Thus, some of the material in this report represents entirely new information relative to infant health among the state's Indian population.

As discussed at length in the previous report (2), race-identity patterns appear to have changed significantly during the 1970s and to have affected dissimilarly the numerators (births, deaths, etc.) and denominators (population counts) of vital statistics rates. Hence, population-based rates for Indians are not reliable and hence are not utilized in this report.

In most of the tables of this report, data are shown separately for reservation and nonreservation Indians; the former are comprised of Indians residing in Graham, Jackson, and Swain counties. Due to the statistical problem of small numbers of events, many of the rates—particularly single-year rates for Indians—may be associated with large random errors.

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

At the time of the 1980 Census, residents reporting race as American Indian numbered 64,536 and accounted for 1.1% of the total N.C. population. Fifty-five percent lived in Robeson County and accounted for 35% of that county's population. Another 8.2% lived in the Cherokee Reservation counties of Graham, Jackson and Swain. Other counties with sizable Indian populations include Columbus, Cumberland, Hoke, Jackson, and Scotland. (2)

For the purposes of this report, health indicators from the 1980 Census (3-5) have been grouped according to the nature of the sociodemographic characteristic reported. In some cases, the Census has reported data for American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts as a group, but as shown in Table 1, the number of Eskimos and Aleuts is extremely small, accounting for less than 0.2% of the combined group.